



# Partnerships for Health

*Creating a vision of health for the 21<sup>st</sup> century*

## Public Health Myths and Facts

- Myth:** *Getting sick from eating contaminated food is not a problem in America because food poisonings are rare occurrences*
- Fact:** Each year there are over 40,000 cases of E. coli poisonings reported in the United States resulting in over 250 deaths annually. Millions of Americans get sick every year from something they ate, but less than 5% of food illnesses are reported to public health authorities
- Myth:** *We have won the battle against infectious diseases in America*
- Fact:** The CDC reports that between 1980 and 1992 deaths from infectious diseases in the United States increased by 58%.
- Myth:** *Infectious diseases are only a small, insignificant problem compared to the many other major diseases facing our health system.*
- Fact:** The CDC reports that infectious diseases cost more than \$120 billion each year, representing one out of every six health care dollars. The emergence of antibiotic-resistant “superbugs” is an urgent threat to the health of Americans. It has the potential to roll our ability to fight common bacteria back to the pre-antibiotic era.
- Myth:** *Smoking tobacco poses health problems for smokers, but it is of little consequence to me because I don't smoke.*
- Fact:** Everyone bears the cost of smoking. Environmental (passive) tobacco smoke is a known human carcinogen, responsible for about 3000 lung cancer deaths per year among non-smokers. Additionally, smoking is the #1 cause of death in the United States, causing 420,000 deaths each year. Medical costs were estimated to total \$50 billion in 1993.
- Myth:** *Health care in America is better than anywhere else in the world, and all Americans benefit from our system.*
- Fact:** African-American men and women have age-adjusted death rates for stroke and heart diseases that are 1.5 to 2 times higher than death rates among white, non-Hispanic men and women. More than 45 million Americans have no health care coverage. The United States has the highest teen pregnancy rate among all developed countries. Homicide rates among young American men are higher than in any other Western industrialized country.
- Myth:** *Our public health system in America is state-of-the-art and includes close coordination between federal, state, and local health departments to respond to any crisis.*
- Fact:** In a recent test, the CDC found it was unable to contact nearly half of the local public health departments in America within 24 hours. In December 1999, a CDC official stated in The New York Times, “Over several decades, the capabilities of state and local health departments have waned. They don't have the resources to do what they can and need to do. Many county health departments don't have computers, don't have e-mail or Internet capabilities.”